

# Debt conciliation boards need of hour: Gill

Former Union Minister says committees suggested by Punjab Govt won't serve any purpose

## Suicide bid by another farmer in Mansa

**BHARAT KHANNA**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

MANSA, MAY 13

Unable to pay for a tractor he purchased a month ago, Jagsir Singh of Bareh village tried to commit suicide by consuming poison.

Jagsir Singh (40), the sole bread-winner, owns five acres of land.

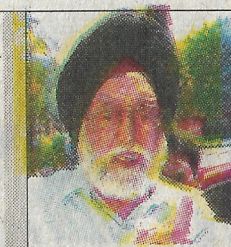
"Jagsir Singh bought a tractor in haste. Repenting the decision, he tried to return the tractor within 15 days of the purchase, but in vain. He then consumed poison," said Jagmai Singh, a relative. Jagsir Singh is in a private hospital. Investigating officer Raghubir Singh said: "The farmer attempted suicide five days ago by consuming some pesticide. He is not in a condition to give any statement."

Dr Amritpal, who is treating Jagsir Singh, said his condition was critical.

ment agencies. There was no provision to send the farmers to jail in case of their failure to repay the loan, he said.

But when reforms were introduced in the 1990s, the process was started to send farmers to jail, file cases against them and seize their sources of livelihood. "While crores of rupees borrowed by industrialists and rich traders are declared non-performing assets (NPAs) by banks but in case the money is borrowed by farmers, warrants are issued to arrest them," said Gill. He said loans to farmers hit by vagaries of weather could easily be declared as NPAs.

He said he had been told that no farmer could be arrested in Haryana as the government there had issued related orders. "Why cannot the Punjab Government take such steps when hundreds of farmers have ended their lives in the past decade or so," asked Gill.



"No farmer can be arrested in Haryana as the government there has issued related orders. Why cannot Punjab take such steps when hundreds of farmers have ended their lives in the past decade or so?"

MS GILL, FORMER UNION MINISTER

### How it was handled in the past

- Sir Chhotu Ram, an ideologue of the Jat peasantry, helped in setting up debt conciliation boards at the tehsil level in the 1930s
- The boards, having government officials in their ranks, used to hold public hearings
- The debt-ridden farmers, moneylenders and others concerned were given an opportunity to explain their position
- The aim was to relieve farmers from the burden of debt and free them from the clutches of moneylenders
- Unreasonable interest charged on borrowed money was done away with and farmers were asked to repay the loan in easy instalments

Chhotu Ram had helped in setting up boards at the tehsil level to relieve the farmers off the burden of debt and free them from the clutches of moneylenders. The boards having government officials in their ranks used to hold public hearings to provide debt-

ridden farmers, moneylenders and others concerned an opportunity to explain their position. "Unreasonable interest charged on borrowed money was done away with and farmers were told to repay the loan in easy installments," said Gill. The same model should be applied now in Punjab, he said. The moneylenders then used to charge high rate of interest on the loans advanced to farmers. Sir Chhotu Ram ensured that farmers' household goods, their land and implements were not seized by the moneylenders or govern-



**SARBJIT DHALIWAL**  
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, MAY 13

Former Union Minister MS Gill today claimed that the forming of a committee by the state government to deal with farm suicides, mostly triggered by debt, would not serve any purpose.

Speaking to The Tribune on phone from New Delhi, Gill said the problem could only be addressed by setting up debt conciliation boards at the district or sub-division level, as was done on the advice of Sir Chhotu Ram in the 1930s.

Sir Chhotu Ram was one of the prominent pre-Partition politicians in Punjab. He was an ideologue of the Jat peasantry and a champion of its interests.

Gill said the late Sir